SKILLSIGNAL™
Construction Safety & Compliance

TOOLBOX TALK

The Cord-and-Plug Exception: The Plug in Your Pocket Is the Lock. Everywhere Else, It Isn't.

TOPIC NO.	DURATION	AUDIENCE
LO-11	10 to 15 min	All Crew

OSHA REFERENCE 29 CFR 1910.147(a)(2)(iii)(A) · 29 CFR 1910.147(b) · 29 CFR 1926.417

PROJECT / JOBSITE	DATE	PRESENTED BY

01 THE HOOK

START HERE

You are changing the blade on a chop saw. You unplug it, set the plug on the bench, and walk to the truck for the new blade. While you are gone, the apprentice needs the extension cord for the grinder, finds the saw plug on the bench, and plugs it back in on his way past, because that is where it was. You come back and reach into the blade housing on a saw that is now live. The standard has an exception that says you do not have to lock out a cord-and-plug tool. The exception has one condition, and you just broke it. The plug has to stay in your control the entire time. Not on the bench. Not on the cart. In your control.

02 THE EXCEPTION, WORD FOR WORD

THE CONDITION

EXCLUSIVE CONTROL

1910.147(a)(2)(iii)(A)

WHAT THE STANDARD ACTUALLY SAYS

29 CFR 1910.147(a)(2)(iii)(A): the standard does not apply to "work on cord and plug connected electric equipment for which exposure to the hazards of unexpected energization or start up of the equipment is controlled by **the unplugging of the equipment from the energy source** and by **the plug being under the exclusive control of the employee performing the servicing or maintenance.**" Two conditions, both required: unplugging controls **all** the hazard, and the plug stays with **you**.

03 THE TWO CONDITIONS, TAKEN APART

CONDITION **1**

UNPLUGGING MUST KILL ALL THE HAZARDOUS ENERGY

The exception only works if the plug is the **only** energy source. A portable compressor is cord-and-plug, but the tank still holds 125 psi after you unplug it: the pneumatic energy is not controlled by the plug, so the exception does not apply to the tank. A tool with a capacitor bank (some welders, some drives) holds a charge after unplugging. A battery-powered tool has no plug at all; the battery comes out. If unplugging leaves anything stored, you are back to full lockout for that source.

CONDITION **2**

THE PLUG STAYS UNDER YOUR EXCLUSIVE CONTROL

Exclusive means one person: you. If two people are working on the tool, no one has exclusive control and the exception is gone. **Control** means the plug is in your hand, in your pocket, or within arm’s reach and in your line of sight the whole time. Walking to the truck for a blade breaks control. Lunch breaks control. “It is right there on the bench” is not control.

✓ THE EXCEPTION APPLIES	✗ THE EXCEPTION DOES NOT APPLY
THE TOOL **Chop saw, table saw, drill press, bench grinder, portable mixer: unplugging removes every energy source**	THE TOOL **Portable compressor (tank pressure), welder with capacitors, anything with a spring-loaded or raised component, anything hardwired**
THE PEOPLE One person servicing the tool, holding the plug	THE PEOPLE Two or more people on the same tool: each needs a lock on a plug lockout device
THE PLUG In your hand, in your pocket, or within arm's reach and in sight for the entire job	THE PLUG On the bench, on the cart, in the cord reel, around the corner, or left while you go get a part
WHEN CONTROL IS LOST You take the plug with you, or you finish and plug it back in yourself	WHEN CONTROL IS LOST Put a **plug lockout** (a lockable cap over the plug) on it with your personal lock, and now it is a regular lockout

04 THE CONSTRUCTION ANGLE

Most tools on a jobsite are cord-and-plug or battery, which is why this exception matters more here than in a plant. Two things to keep in mind. **29 CFR 1926.417** still requires that circuits and equipment you deenergize be **rendered inert and tagged** when the work is on the circuit itself, not just the tool. And the exception is about **unexpected energization**, not about the other hazards: a chop saw with the plug in your pocket still has a blade that can cut you while you change it. Unplugging handles the start-up hazard. Gloves, the blade guard, and the right wrench handle the rest.

⚠ **"I UNPLUGGED IT" IS ONLY HALF THE SENTENCE**

The whole sentence is "I unplugged it, and the plug has been in my control every second since." If you cannot say the second half, the exception does not cover you and the tool may be live. If you have to leave, take the plug with you or put a plug lock on it. If there is a tank, a capacitor, a spring, or a raised part, unplugging did not make it safe. And if there is any doubt at all, lock it out. The standard does not penalize you for locking out a cord tool. It penalizes you for not locking out one you should have.

05 WHY IT MATTERS

[JOBSITE]

FOR THE CREW

This exception is the most common lockout question an inspector gets on a construction site, and the most common one crews get wrong by treating “unplugged” as “safe.” Plug lockout caps in the gang box, and a crew that knows the two conditions, turns it from a gray area into a rule.

[INDIVIDUAL]

FOR YOU

Changing a blade, clearing a jam, swapping a bit: the tool starts in your hand at the worst possible moment if the plug was somewhere else. The plug in your pocket is the one lockout you can do in two seconds with no hardware. Do it every time.

[HOME]

FOR LIFE OFF-SITE

The same rule at home: the plug of the table saw, the garbage disposal, the dryer stays in your hand or in your sight while you are inside it. Nobody in the house plugs it back in on the way past.

06 TODAY’S DRILL

TODAY’S DRILL **POCKET THE PLUG**

The next time anyone on the crew services a cord-and-plug tool today (blade, bit, belt, jam), the plug goes in their pocket before their hands go in the tool, and stays there until the tool is back together. If they need to leave the tool, the plug goes with them or a plug lockout goes on it. Then check the gang box for plug lockout caps. If there are none, order them today. They cost less than a blade.

07 CREW DISCUSSION

Take 2 minutes. Pick one.

1. Which cord-and-plug tool on this site gets serviced most? Where does the plug usually end up while that happens?

2. Has anyone ever had a tool start while they were working on it? Where was the plug?

3. Which tools on this site hold energy after you unplug them: compressors, welders, anything with a spring or a raised part?

08 ATTENDANCE & SIGN-OFF

All attendees confirm they participated in this Toolbox Talk and understand the content covered.

NAME (PRINT)	SIGNATURE

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE

_____ Date: _____

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